

Blues made to struggle

By ALAN HUTCHINSON Wycombe Wands 2, Hitchin T. 0

WYCOMBE Wanderers made heavy weather of defeating a poor Hitchin Town side in their Berger Isthmian League match at Loakes Park on Saturday. Neither side settled well in what turned out to be a scrappy game.

Blues made two changes from the side that defeated Hayes in Mid-week. Peter Spittle replaced injured goal-keeper John Maskell while Steve Hardwick came in for Alan Phillips.

They suffered a further set-back early in the game when full-back Paul Birdseye was left lying in the penalty area after a corner on the left. Although in pain with an obvious rib injury, he carried on until half-time.

After 17 minutes Holifield and Atkins broke clear of the

Hitchin defence but goal-keeper Bradwell was able to scurry the chance away for a corner, from the kick Keith Mead sent in a firm header that went past the post.

Hitchin were relying on their keeper pumping long balls to the head of the lanky striker, McCarthy, who despite his height found it difficult to get the better of Hardwick and Mead in the air.

Just before half-time a series of chances brought the game to life. For Wycombe Atkins wriggled free of full-back Baldry to cut in on goal but his shot was smothered by Bradwell. Hitchin replied with a twin attack by Giggle and Hammond who combined to create a chance for Hammond whose shot flew past the post.

But the best chance of the half fell to Steve Long who

had drifted to the far post in a perfect position to latch onto a lofted ball over the top of the defence. Although it came to him at an awkward height he controlled it well but alas his shot roared into the side netting without testing the keeper.

At the start of the second half both sides made substitutions. As expected Birdseye went off with damaged ribs and was replaced by John Priestley, and the Hitchin striker, McCarthy, who was injured on the stroke of half-time, was replaced by Adrian Taylor.

The second half opened brightly. Dylan Evans saw a first-time shot just go wide, Holifield broke clear on the half-way line but in trying to outrun the defence left the ball behind, and he was involved immediately in lung-

ing at a ball in the penalty area that almost found its way into the net.

Much messy play followed with the ball being given away too frequently by both sides before the game was given an injection after 55 minutes.

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Steve Long had wandered into a similar position from which he had a scoring chance in the first half and on this occasion made it count.

The ball was lofted over the heads of the defence by Priestley to find Long unmarked at the far post. He seemed to have weeks to get the ball under control before planting it into the back of the net.

The goal was a tonic to Wycombe who settled far better and began to look menacing for the first time in the match.

Ten minutes later Wycombe went further ahead, a foul by Baldry on Allanson outside the area resulted in Kennedy playing the ball to Allanson who whisked it through the heart of the defensive wall for Atkins to tuck away.

Hitchin looked as if they might crumble and concede a few more goals but good front running by Giggle and Taylor presented them with a chance to climb back.

Taylor went round Davies before setting up Martin with a shooting chance that struck Spittle's hand and went over the top for a corner. From the kick Spittle lost possession — and his sense of direction — allowing Baldry to crash a shot against the bar.

With the final minutes ticking away it was the diminutive Giggle who showed some fine close skills that could have led to a goal for Hitchin had their forwards been more aggressive.

WYCOMBE: Spittle, Birdseye (sub Priestley 45 mins), Davies, Mead, Hardwick, Allanson, Atkins, Holifield, Evans, Kennedy, Long.

HITCHIN: Bradwell, Gear, Baldry, Brimson, Grafton, Hammond, Baker, Carroll, Giggle, McCarthy (sub Taylor 45 mins), Martin.

Half-time: 0-0. **Scorers:** Wycombe — Long (55 mins), Atkins (65).



STEVE LONG
... Blues scorer

Two injury doubts

WYCOMBE Wanderers have injury doubts about John Maskell and Paul Birdseye as they prepare to exact revenge on local rivals Slough Town at Wexham Park Stadium tonight (Tuesday).

Maskell has a nagging hamstring injury, which he aggravates from time to time, while Birdseye received badly bruised ribs in Saturday's match against Hitchin. Peter Spittle and Garry Fowles are standing by.

Manager Andy Williams is still trying to sort out his best combination, at the centre of the defence — that's why Alan Phillips was left out on Saturday. The new combination of Steve Hardwick and Keith Mead was so rarely tested on by Hitchin that Mr Williams might want to give them another game together.

Which ever team he fields, Wycombe will be extra keen to avenge the 1-0 defeat Slough inflicted at Loakes Park last month with a late goal by David Russell.

BERGER ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enfield	15	9	2	4	26	14	29
Hendon	15	8	4	3	25	21	28
Croydon	12	8	0	3	28	14	27
Wycombe	15	8	3	4	28	14	27
Leatherhead	14	8	2	4	26	11	26
Dulwich	12	6	5	1	15	6	23
Hitchin	14	7	2	5	21	19	23
Barking	12	6	4	2	30	20	22
W'thamstow	13	7	1	5	22	14	22
Woking	13	5	5	3	23	20	20
Dagenham	15	6	2	6	17	21	20
Boreham Wd	13	5	4	4	18	14	19
Tring	15	5	3	7	18	20	18
Slough	11	6	2	4	10	10	17
Hayes	13	3	5	5	17	24	14
Oxford	12	4	2	6	16	28	14
Staines	13	3	3	7	14	23	12
Tilbury	13	3	1	9	15	32	10
Kingston	12	2	3	7	9	20	9
Sutton	13	2	2	9	12	23	8
C'shalton	12	0	7	5	10	19	7
L'stone	12	1	2	9	8	20	5